

Views: Coming Out

For years before I came out I was sure that if and when I ever did, friends and family would retreat from me, forever, in disgust. The sheer force of the event, I foresaw, would be sufficient to blow the roof clean off of our house. Neither happened. For me coming out is as it has always been: anticlimactic, unexpectedly uneventful.

Every openly gay man knows that coming out isn't just a one-time occurrence. You have to do it over and over again: every time you face the prospect of a new friendship, change jobs, encounter a long-lost relative, tell a niece or nephew "old enough to know," or accompany your partner to a medical appointment.

But, what is supposed to happen when you tell someone you're gay?

The first family member I confided in was my older sister. We were sitting at the kitchen table. She stiffened and paled during the agonizing length of time I

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dered somebody!"

I was amazed that my sister thought me capable of murder and equally amazed that my disclosure had not fazed her in the least. If she knew, or thought she knew, why hadn't she ever said anything to me? I had squandered months of adrenaline preparing to unburden myself of my big, horrible secret, but all the time she knew.

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in her eyes.

"When I was a girl," she began quietly, "I had a crush on one of my teachers." I thought I grasped her meaning but waited a long time before asking cautiously, "Was your teacher a female?" "Yes," my mother replied. I was dumbstruck. When I recovered I asked, "So, what did you do?" I figured we were in for a very long talk; but as the question was leaving my lips she was out of her chair and on her way to the kitchen. She shrugged and said over her shoulder, "I grew up and married your father. Do you want a cup of coffee?"

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I recently attended a new-teacher seminar at my school. For an icebreaker participants were asked to divide into groups and share something we believed made us unique from the others in our group. Nobody in our foursome seemed eager to go first so finally I said, "All right, I'll go." These days, I am committed to being out at work, too, so once again I braced myself and declared, "I live in a small town with my same-sex partner and our dogs and cat." Then I held my breath and waited.

"That's not unique," one quick-thinking colleague shot back. "I have a cat." ▼

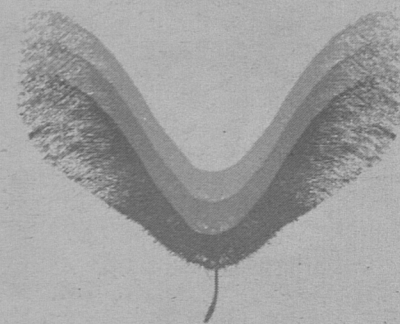
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took to prepare her. Finally, I blurted it out. Her hand flew to her chest; her breathing resumed; color returned to her cheeks. "Jesus Christ!" she shrieked, "I thought you were going to tell me you mur-

gay?

Months later I felt prepared to tell my mother. We were in the living room. I said, "Ma, I have something to tell you: I'm gay." The co-author of my life grew silent and got a far away look



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